

INSTITUTE FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**MACEDONIA – ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW**

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The Ohrid Agreement, adopted in 2001 to stop the Albanian armed rebellion in Macedonia has proven quite a complex answer to a relatively simple question. The question, of course, was how to make possible the cohabitation between the majority Slav Macedonians and the minority Albanians within the fragile state system of the Republic of Macedonia. According to the present day European standards, an extended minority status for the Albanians, representing between 18-22 percent of the population, should prove sufficient to guarantee their rights and satisfy their communal aspirations within a democratic system of representation. Such a status involves elements of cultural and territorial – administrative autonomy, mother tongue education and administrative services, etc. All those rights and elements of communal autonomy were present in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia from 1991. They were extended not only to the largest minority of the country – the Albanians, but also to the communities of Turks, Roma, Serbs and some smaller minorities in the country.

The crisis of 2001 has shown the exhausted potential of the 1991 constitutional system. First, the major Albanian parties in Macedonia throughout the 1990s have not agreed with the status of minority, granted to the Albanian community by the constitution. Based on the status that the Albanians enjoyed in ex-Yugoslavia (including the constituent Republic of Macedonia) – *Albanian people* (“*narodnost*”) – the Albanian Macedonian elites after 1991 considered it *relative deprivation*, or degradation of status to be defined as a *minority*. Second, the Albanians have been dissatisfied with inequality of education opportunities, compared to Macedonians, who enjoyed Macedonian language training at all levels of education, including the state universities. The attempt to open an independent Albanian university in Tetovo was a painful issue for years – the university functioned on semi-legal grounds until 2001. Third, disproportionate representation of Albanian nationals in the system of public administration at all levels (with principally regular representation of Albanians in the parliament and the

government of the country) caused their complaints of being treated as “second class citizens”.

The Albanian revolt, organized by the so called “National Liberation Army” – NLA – has been legitimized with the failure of Macedonian majority to meet the demands, defined above - if an armed revolt against a democratic system could have any legitimacy at all. There was a hidden important context in the NLA rebellion – it was directed not only and not as much against the Macedonian majority and the state, but more against the Albanian party in power at the time – the Democratic Party of the Albanians, DPA. The armed change of power positions within the Albanian elite has been the core agenda of the NLA revolt. The outer form of legitimization has been the claim of an advanced communal status for the Albanians within Macedonian state.

To elevate the status of Albanians from minority to a “constitutive community” (the ex-Yugoslav concept had been “*državotvorni narod*”) of Macedonia would normally require a process of territorial federalization or con-federalization of the republic. The momentum, which the Albanian national question on the Balkans had gained with the Kosovo NATO operation of 1999 has directly supported the escalation of the Albanian – Macedonian political agenda up to the federalization claims. Yet the wording of such claims has never been made by the Albanian NLA leaders. It’s been a tactical compromise with the major taboo of the Slav Macedonian majority – to consider a substantive change in the constitutional backgrounds of the republic.

The unitary character of the state is considered by the Slav Macedonians not simply as a defense barrier against militant ethnic destabilization. For the Macedonians this unitary state definition is much more – a core part of their own national – communal identity. Defined as a separate national entity first within communist Yugoslavia in the late 1940s, Macedonia has principle problems of splitting its historical identity from the identity of its neighbors – ethnic and language identity with Bulgarians, political and toponomical identity with the Greeks – mounting up to a competition of the very name of the republic, territorial and institutional – elitist legacy identity with the Serbs. There is nothing stronger and more legitimate as Macedonian identity than the fact of existence and recognition by the outer world of the territorial integrity and unitary constitutional status of the Republic of Macedonia. To change it and redefine it under pressure into another, federal Macedonian – Albanian state entity equals to many people in Skopje with shaking and making relative this strongest evidence of separate Slav Macedonian national state identity.

This particular complex of identity has shaped the political mechanics of the Republic of Macedonia throughout the 1990s until today. Apart from the very word of “federalization” being a taboo, every institutional element, which could serve – at some indefinite moment – as a potential background for federalization and further split of the state has also been avoided. The major example for the case is the territorial structure of the republic, which causes disputes until today, even under the Ohrid system agreement. Under the Macedonian state system there are only two levels of territorial authority – national and municipal. The intermediate level – or levels – present in practically all

other European countries has been skipped. For what purpose - potentially easier federalization or/and split of mostly Albanian populated regions from the republic.

The federalization scare and identity complex downgrade a much more visible challenge for the observable future – the growing demographic gap between Slav Macedonians and Albanians. The Slav Macedonians rank among the lowest in terms of demographic dynamics while the Albanians – all Albanians, including the Macedonian ones – are the fastest growing ethnicity in Europe. A classical – “Belgian” – type of logic would consider federalization as an instrument of territorial stability and institutional barrier in front of further Albanian ethnic expansion on Macedonian territory. Not the Slav Macedonian logic, which perceives unitary state status as the key instrument of saving identity.

The Albanian armed radicalism and the Macedonian institutional identity complex did not allow the implementation of any kind of federal instruments in the crisis mediation and resolution in 2001. The international community tried to make both ends meet through introducing a complex system of “consociational democracy”, which exists mostly in the advanced political science textbooks and has been experimented within small communities of “post-material” culture¹, rather than in developing or transitional societies. Defined in broader details in the works of Arendt Lijphart and Donald Horowitz, consociational or consensual democracy involves a more sophisticated mechanics of representation and decision making rather than the usual system of majority representation. We can distinguish between three levels of complexity in the representation and the decision making process. First, the classical liberal democratic system, which applies in integrated communities and unitary state systems. Representation creates majority opinion and instrument of decision-making. The minority is also represented, holding immunity of rights. Second, the federal system, where simple majorities do not work, but certain amount of consensus among federal units is required. The representation process within the federal units is based on producing classical simple majorities, described above. Third, the system of consensual democracy, where efficiency requires not minimal, but largest possible consensus opinion, produced across the constituent communities, as well as within the constituent communities.

In the case of Macedonia, the Ohrid Agreement presumed not simply an institutional mechanism of decision making across ethnic lines, but also within the ethnic communities, among their different political constituent parts. In the 1990s, the political system encouraged the twinning process of representation and government across ethnic lines. Both biggest Macedonian parties – SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE – had twinned for consecutive governments with both strongest Albanian parties – the PDP and the DPA, placing political – ideological competition entirely within ethnic communities, with guaranteed ethnic balance in the national institutions as a consequence². The system failed in 2001 when a new Albanian player bypassed the twinning arrangement and claimed control over the Albanian community through a revolt against the existing political status quo. This is why, the Ohrid Agreement had to involve inner communal guarantees of institutional stability, apart from the inter-communal framework – replacing or reproducing the twinning mechanism. The search for consensual decision

making across those two different levels made it possible – and necessary to implement the consensual democracy pattern of representation and political interaction.

The efficiency of consensual democracy implementation after the Ohrid agreement was not high in Macedonia, to say the least. First, the twinning mechanism of cross-ethnic decision-making has been entirely reproduced by the SDSM-DUI government after the 2002 elections. The traditional partner of SDSM – PDP has been replaced by the victorious leaders of the NLA armed rebellion, organized into the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). The low level of governmental efficiency in running the country was paralleled with intense inner communal political disputes: The former governing Macedonian party VMRO-DPMNE was reduced to several splinter groups, additionally antagonized by the victorious SDSM, holding all mechanisms of power. The same applied on the Albanian side, where DUI leader Ahmeti was steadily reducing the DPA and its leader Arben Xhafferri to a minor group within the Albanian community.

The nominal application of the consensual democracy mechanism has shown up with the first major challenge of applying the Ohrid Agreement – the decentralization law. In a process of reducing 134 municipalities of the country to 90 bigger territorial units, the government attempted to solve three tasks altogether. First, to compensate for the missing intermediate regional level through establishing bigger and more sustainable municipalities. Second, to reshape certain municipalities for the purpose of better ethnic balance and interdependence within them. This was the painful part of the reform. Under it, Skopje was declared bi-lingual city, Struga has been united with another municipality and the new entity provided general majority of the Albanian citizens there, the same applied for two other major cities – Kichevo and Gostivar. Losing their majority status, the Slav Macedonians in those cities and regions presumed they will be subjected to informal and gradual pressure to leave their homes in favor of expanding Albanian communities.³ Third, and utmost important, the decentralization law had to provide particular incentives in the hands of Macedonian Albanian leaders to drive the Albanian ethnic issues in Macedonia apart from the agenda of other Albanian communities on the Balkans, in particular – apart from Kosovo. All major shake-ups in Kosovo have so far produced almost automatic repercussions in the Albanian parts of Macedonia. Splitting the Albanian communal question in Macedonia from the Kosovo agenda is the most important precondition of stabilizing Macedonia as state.

The government of Macedonia has intentionally bypassed the consensual democratic mechanism to negotiate the decentralization law, and passed the law through the parliament with no public debate, using the techniques of *fait accompli*. Such a “twinning trick” on behalf of SDSM and DUI across ethnic lines has opened the door for fierce political debate, viewed by both the Macedonian and the Albanian opposition parties as a welcome opportunity to fight the government and – if possible – to replace it with early elections. This is the logic of initiating the decentralization law referendum, organized on November 7, 2004 by the parties of opposition and supported by different public circles and citizens’ movements in Macedonia. The referendum has failed, yet the

problems that brought it to the scene might reappear in other crisis circumstances, if not properly addressed in time.

The failure of the referendum, influenced also by the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name by the US government, has stabilized the positions of both SDSM and DUI as parties of government *vis-à-vis* the sensitive decentralization law issues. Yet the resignation of prime minister Hari Kostov, the public clashes between the coalition partners on controversial issues of big corruption (as the case with the transport minister), the mounting critics within the country and from abroad on the low efficiency and absence of reformist agenda of the government, are clear indicators that Macedonian political system continues to host two alternative patterns of representation and citizens' integration – the nominal outer framework of “consensual democracy” and the essential internal model of “twinning” partisanship. Such coexistence promises crisis developments at any time when important decisions have to be made across ethnic lines – in meeting the requirements of the Ohrid agreement, or for another purpose.

After the crisis of 2001 no effective return to the political system of twinning partnerships is possible. The political institutional design of the Republic of Macedonia may principally follow two alternative paths – consensual democracy with an evolving system of flexible inner- and inter-ethnic checks and balances, or a federal/ proto-federal/ hidden federal arrangement, making ethnic coexistence possible until another option appears or is being enforced from the outside. There are no obvious signs that the political elites of the country are prepared to pursue in a systemic manner any of those two options. Rather, strategies for day-to-day survival and benefit are flourishing. The old habits to hide problems until they “jump on the table” remain largely popular. Partisan instrumental attitudes prevail, which makes it possible describing the Macedonian political elites of the both sides through the metaphor of an ostrich, hiding its head in the sand – therefore attempting to avoid the predators that always hang around in search for prey.

¹ Inglehart, Ronald. “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Integrational Change in Post-Industrial Societies”, Irvington Publishers: 1993.

² Never an Albanian party could emerge as competitor for a Macedonian party and vice versa.

³ Those fears are well grounded in previous practices of demographic expansionism of the Albanians in the western and northern parts of Macedonia in the last 150 years. Albanian communities – and not only in Macedonia, but also in Kosovo – are well known for their principle unwillingness to live in multicultural environment. They would basically prefer to use certain forms of daily pressure to cleanse the territory from inhabitants of other ethnic identity.

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